

Georg von der Gabelentz and “das lautsymbolische Gefühl”. A chapter in the history of iconicity research

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1. Introduction

The history of research on iconicity in language remains to be written. There exist a number of brief historical overviews in which the focus is on the usual “highlights”: Plato, a number of Medieval scholastics, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Charles S. Peirce, Otto Jespersen, Maurice Grammont, Edward Sapir, Roman Jakobson, John Haiman (cf. Jakobson & Waugh 1987: ch. 4, Wandruszka 1952, Swiggers 1993, Magnus 2013, as well as parts in Bühler 1934, Verburg [1951] 1998, Trabandt 1986, Joseph 2000, Fónagy 2001, Monneret 2003, De Cuypere 2008 and Nobile 2014). However, a comprehensive account of the role of iconicity research in the history of the language sciences is still lacking. In particular, there has been no systematic study of the historical development of iconicity research throughout the 19th century and at the turn to the 20th century, when modern linguistic studies took shape. This is regrettable, not only because everyone agrees that iconicity touches on the very definition of the linguistic sign in its modern interpretation (Fischer & Nänny 1999), but also because studies on the relationship between arbitrariness and iconicity are occasionally marred by conceptual confusions which need to be addressed and resolved. A focus on the history of iconicity research is likely to be the appropriate starting point. Magnus (2013: 201-202), for instance, claims that Saussure was an “opponent of the sound symbolic hypothesis” due to the fact that for Saussure “word meaning is a single monolithic thing – the word’s referent”. In fact, the opposite is true. Saussure goes to great lengths to show that a word’s meaning (“signifié”) and its referent should not be confused and that meanings should not be thought of as things (Saussure [1916] 1968: 147-152, 251-276). Saussure’s theory of the linguistic sign is not only compatible with sound symbolism, and with iconicity in general (Willems 2005), there are also several instances in Saussure’s work in which he provides subtle analyses

of linguistic iconicity at various levels of expression (Joseph 2015). The lesson to learn from this particular example is that a coherent theory of language which gives centre stage to the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign does not contradict iconicity, quite on the contrary: a coherent conception of arbitrariness is likely to be a precondition of a coherent conception of iconicity, and vice versa. Moreover, the view that one complements the other can be traced back long before modern linguistics. Support for it can, e.g., already be found in the writings of Leibniz (Gensini 1995, 2005).

In any future history of iconicity research, a chapter will have to be reserved to a singular figure in the history of linguistics: Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1893). Only few scholars have paid attention to Gabelentz' views on iconicity. Coseriu (1967: 97) mentions Gabelentz' "interesting and fertile ideas" on sound symbolism, without further discussion, like Schuchardt (1897: 205) had done before him. The most comprehensive reference to date is a two-page summary of Gabelentz' views on sound symbolism in Jakobson & Waugh (1987: 181-183). For the rest, it seems that Gabelentz' observations have gone largely unnoticed in modern scholarship. In this article I therefore discuss some of his observations on sound symbolism as they can be found in his magnum opus *Die Sprachwissenschaft* ([1891] 1901). Although reflections on the expressive values of sounds have a long tradition in Western thinking, Gabelentz is among the first scholars who turned the previously mostly intuitive and unsystematic presentations of this aspect of language into a more systematic approach based on a number of insightful conceptual distinctions. After Gabelentz, the role of sound symbolism has been increasingly discussed by scholars, e.g. Paul ([1880] 1909), Wundt (1900), Leskien (1902/1903), Rubinyi (1913), among others. However, it seems that the importance and the proper place of Gabelentz in this historical development has not been duly appreciated.

2 A short biographical profile of Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1893)

Gabelentz was a descendent of Saxon nobility in Germany, his full name was Hans Georg Conon von der Gabelentz. He was the son of Hans Conon von der Gabelentz

(1807–1874) who was himself a linguist of some renown. Like his father, Gabelentz began his career in the civil service of his home state Saxony, but his true passion was languages (for a complete biographical profile, see Ezawa & von Vogel, eds. 2013). After earning a doctoral degree in Dresden in 1876 with a dissertation on Chinese, Gabelentz became a professor of East Asian languages at the University of Leipzig in 1878. In 1889 he was appointed to a professorship in East Asian languages and General linguistics at the University of Berlin. A sinologist and general linguist, Gabelentz is now considered one of the founding fathers of modern language typology. He is best remembered for two major publications: his *Chinesische Grammatik* (1881) and a remarkable treatise on general linguistics, *Die Sprachwissenschaft* (1891). The latter book appeared only two years before Gabelentz' premature death. A second, expanded edition was published by his nephew Albrecht von der Schulenburg in 1901. Both editions met with mixed reactions at the time of their publication, partly because Gabelentz was not an avid follower of the dominant neo-grammarians doctrine of his time but probably also because of his turgid style and some curiously outdated views on the unequal merits of languages and races. Other notable publications of Gabelentz include two interesting articles on comparative syntax (Gabelentz 1869 and 1875).

3 “Das lautsymbolische Gefühl”

At various places in his *Sprachwissenschaft* ([1891] 1901), Gabelentz raises “the question of the proper expressive values inherent in the sounds of speech” (Jakobson & Waugh 1987: 182). Gabelentz occasionally discusses other forms of iconicity as well, for instance the “naturalness” of a grammatical category such as the dual in the light of (our experience of) things that come in pairs in the world (254). He also considers the inherent “appropriateness” of the SVO word order in which the verb is the relator in the middle (“Mittler”, 461), etc. However, Jakobson & Waugh (1987) are right in pointing out that Gabelentz is particularly interested in what we nowadays call “phonological iconicity” (De Cuypere 2008: 107). Of course, Gabelentz does not yet use the now current terminology. Instead he uses terms such

as “das lautsymbolische Gefühl”, i.e. the sound-symbolic feeling (218 and *passim*), “Lautsymbolik” (‘sound symbolism’, 222, 434), “Lautmalerei”, “Klangmalerei” and “Lautmimik” (different terms referring to ‘onomatopoeia’, 65, 227, 480), “Lautnachahmung” (‘sound imitation’, 208), “Stimmungsmimik” (‘mood miming’, 376-380), etc. Although onomatopoeia in particular had been discussed under various terms long before Gabelentz – and at least since Johann Gottfried Herder from a decidedly “modern” perspective (cf. Wundt 1900: ch. 3 for an overview until the turn of the century) –, the wealth of terms in Gabelentz’ account is not coincidental. It not only reflects the diversity of the issues Gabelentz discusses when dealing with the expressive values of speech sounds (language acquisition, linguistic creativity and fantasy, language change, the “origin” of words), it also shows Gabelentz’ awareness of the fact that sound symbolism is a much more extensive phenomenon than onomatopoeia. Below I summarize the passages that are particularly noteworthy, in the order in which they appear in the book.¹

3.1 In a section on language acquisition, Gabelentz refers, by way of an introductory digression, to a German boy he once knew ([1891] 1901: 65). In the course of acquiring his native tongue, the boy created a language which exhibited some interesting peculiarities (“ganz selbständig eine eigene Sprache mit seltsamen Gesetzen [aufbaute]”). In particular, vowels were chosen in virtue of the size of the referents, which is evidence that children acquiring their language may creatively assign meanings to particular sound contrasts which go beyond the immediate language input:

Einen gewöhnlichen Stuhl nannte er Lakeil, einen Grossvaterstuhl Lukul, ein Puppenstühlchen Likill; für alles Runde hatte er die Wurzel *m-m*. Der Mond oder ein Teller hiess Mem, eine grosse runde Schüssel Mom oder Mum, die Sterne aber – mit symbolischer Wiederholung – Mim-mim-mim-mimmim. Als sein Vater im grossen Reisepelze vor ihm stand, sagte er nicht

¹ The original orthography of Gabelentz’ text is left unchanged in the quotations which follow. All references are to the second edition (1901); however, additions by Schulenburg are not taken into account. A critical edition of *Die Sprachwissenschaft* in which all additions by Schulenburg are marked up has just come from the press (Gabelentz [1891/1901] 2016).

Papa, sondern Pupu. Hier war also der kindliche Geist, völlig frei schaffend, auf eine innere Wurzelbeugung verfallen, und damit scheint mir bewiesen zu sein, dass innere Veränderungen der Wurzeln nicht immer durch mechanische Prozesse entstanden sein müssen. Spuren einer ähnlichen Lautmalerei finden sich u. A. im Malaischen und sonst vieler Orten. (65)²

Interestingly, Gabelentz points out that repeating a string such as *mim* can have an iconic effect, e.g., evoking a multitude of referents ('stars') (cf. also Gabelentz' remark on reduplication on p. 278). More importantly, Gabelentz links the boy's creative use of sounds to the type of sound pattern that can be found, e.g., in Semitic languages. In these languages, as is well-known, consonants are the primary building blocks ("radicals") of words. They carry the main semantic load and are relatively constant across related series of words which are differentiated through vowel variation and the occasional addition of auxiliary consonants; compare the root *k-t-b* in classical Arabic in *kitâb* 'book', *kutub* 'books', *kâtib* 'writer', *yaktubu* 'he writes', *maktaba* 'library', etc. (cf. Versteegh 1997: 26). Gabelentz points out that, although the constructional principles underlying such series may be considered "mechanical" from a descriptive point of view, the processes leading to their formation must have included creative language use such as onomatopoeia ("Lautmalerei"). In this respect the process of language acquisition, too, is "höchst lehrreich" (65).

3.2 In a section on "Naturlaute" (literally 'natural sounds', [1891] 1901: 208-209), Gabelentz argues – as many scholars have done in recent scholarship, e.g. Hock & Joseph (2009: 223) – that because "nature itself" occasionally brings about the phonetic profile of onomatopoeic words, these words may resist regular sound change. For example, the impetus to reiterate the imitation of a sound ("Lautnachahmung") as in *kikeriki* ('cock-a-doodle-do'), *Kukuk* ('cuckoo', written *Kuckuck* in modern German) and *piepen* ('peep, chirp') has proven stronger than compliance with sound laws, according to Gabelentz (cf. also p. 322 and p. 255 on

² Here and elsewhere, italics in quotations are original, if not stated otherwise.

the additional role of reduplication). It is possible, however, that sound change partially applies or that it occurs with some delay compared to other words, which explains why the resulting forms may still be partly anomalous, compare *pfeifen* ('pipe') in German.

According to Gabelentz, resistance to regular sound change also explains why certain words that can be traced back to original babble words by young children do not comply with the regular sound shape of a language. The sound /ts/ in the German word for 'teat' (*Zitze*) is a case in point:

Die Zitze, englisch teat, heisst, den hochdeutschen Lautgesetzen entgegen, im Schwäbisch-Allemannischen Tüteli. Auch dieses t aber ist dem germanischen Lautgesetze zuwider; denn nach griechisch *τίτθη*, italienisch *tetta*, spanisch *teto*, *teta* wäre urgermanisch und englisch *th*, hochdeutsch *d* zu erwarten; unser *z* in *Zitze* ist aber bekanntlich eine Weiterentwicklung von *t*. (208)

Finally, certain sounds that express a sensation ("Empfindungslaute") are equally impervious to sound laws. This is why, e.g., German *Hm!* and Latin *hem* are virtually identical, which by all standards of sound change they should not be (a wealth of similar examples is discussed, from a comparative perspective, by Wandruszka 1952 and 1954).

3.3 The most elaborate passage in which Gabelentz deals with phonological iconicity in the *Sprachwissenschaft* is a short section entitled "Das lautsymbolische Gefühl" ([1891] 1901: 218-225). The section is actually the text Gabelentz had contributed to a festschrift a few years earlier (Gabelentz 1888). It is framed around a focus on the "natural" attitude – in the phenomenological sense of the term (Willems 2002) – speakers adopt towards language. According to this attitude, Gabelentz argues, things and words may be associated in a way that corresponds, in the terms of the debate on the origin of words in Greek Antiquity, to *φύσει* rather than *θέσει* (218). This means that sounds may have a "symbolic" value of their own:

Jeder Mensch verhält sich zunächst zu seiner Muttersprache naiv: sie ist ihm natürlich, und solange er es nicht erlebt hat, dass anderen Leuten eine andere Sprache ebenso natürlich ist, dünkt es ihm, als könnten die Dinge gar nicht anders heissen, als sie bei ihm daheim benannt werden. [...] Der Laut gilt für symbolisch; das Wort "gelind" scheint einen gelinden Klang zu haben, "hart" einen harten, "süss" einen süssen, "sauer" und "herb" einen saueren und herben. Ob in "hüpfen, springen, schleichen, hinken, humpeln, schreien, wehen, graupeln, tönen, läuten, schnappen, zerren" u.s.w. geschichtlich Schallnachahmungen zu Grunde liegen oder nicht, ist diesem Gefühle ganz gleichgiltig, – ihm dünken die Laute symbolisch. Und ähnlich wird wohl den meisten Deutschen zu Mute sein bei einer Menge Substantiva, z. B. Busch, Strauch, Nuss, Splitter, Faser, Tropfen, Schnecke, Eidechse, Rabe, Eule, Fuchs, Luchs, Säge, Feile, Lappen, Runzel, Sense, Sichel, Zange. Mag unser etymologisches Wissen dazu sagen was es will, für unser Empfinden sind Wörter wie "Blitz" und "Donner", "rund" und "spitz" so innig und naturnothwendig mit ihren Bedeutungen verwachsen, dass wir uns den Fall kaum denken können, es hätten diese beiden Wortpaare ihre Bedeutung ausgetauscht. (218-219)

Gabelentz argues that the same symbolic feeling may also occur when learning other languages. For example, whereas the German word *Blitz* may be associated with the sudden flash of a lightning, Gabelentz feels that the French word *foudre* rather evokes a crushing blow (cf. Jakobson & Waugh 1987: 182), even though he is cognizant of the fact that in Latin *fulgur*, too, means 'lightning'. The propensity to assume a relationship between the form and the meaning of words whenever specific sounds give rise to certain concepts is a kind of "instinct" (219) which linguists have to take seriously, according to Gabelentz. It is, moreover, not confined to relatively concrete conceptual relations. Among a host of examples, Gabelentz mentions the initial semivowel in the phonotactic pattern of relative pronouns and conjunctions in German such as *wie*, *wo*, *wann*, *welcher*, *weil*, *während* and *wegen* (220), the dark, "atmospheric" ("stimmungsvoll") vowel in words such as *dumm*, *stumm*, *stumpf*, *dumpf*, *Dunst* etc. Note that Gabelentz ([1891] 1901: 221) does not claim any originality for these observations, citing instead similar claims already

made by Humboldt in his *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* (1830–1835: 79).³

While historical linguists generally take recourse to “false analogies” to explain deviant forms, linguists should, according to Gabelentz, pay more attention to what he terms “falsche Etymologien”, defined as an inclination of the “feeling for language” (“eine Neigung des Sprachgeföhles”, 222). The kind of association arising from this feeling not only motivates the creation of alliterating idiomatic forms such as *fuchsfeuerrot*, *fix und fertig*, *weit und breit*, Gabelentz argues that it may even influence processes of semantic change. For example, although the change of the verb *to want* in English from ‘to be lacking’, ‘to need’ to ‘to desire’ presupposes the association “Was ich bedarf, das begehre ich” (222), the role of the initial sound of the word *want* should be taken into account as well. Moreover, Gabelentz draws a comparison with Chinese:

Nun hat im Englischen *to want*, bedürfen, die Bedeutung von *to wish* und *to will* angenommen, und ebenso im Chinesischen allmählich *yaó*, bedürfen, die Bedeutung von *yuén*, wünschen und *yuk*, wollen. Es ist wohl erlaubt anzunehmen, dass hierbei die Gleichheit der Anlaute eine Art Anziehungskraft geübt habe. (222)

Forms which in origin are semantically unrelated thus develop what Gabelentz terms “selective affinities” (“Wahlverwandschaften”, 222). This process may even lead to the creation of new words:

So scheint es mir auch sehr denkbar, dass zwei verschiedene, sinnverwandte Gruppen sich zur Schöpfung einer bastardischen Neubildung vermählen. Nehmen wir die Gruppen
ziehen, zerren, zausen, zucken
und
reissen, raufen, rupfen, raffén, rucken:
so wäre es psychologisch erklärlich, wenn das Wort rupfen der zweiten Gruppe in die erste einen Sprössling “zupfen” verpflanzt hätte. (224)

³ Humboldt is one of the great inspirations of Gabelentz and regularly cited throughout the *Sprachwissenschaft*. For a succinct presentation of Humboldt’s views on iconicity in language, s. Trabant (1986: 69-90).

3.4 In a section on the principles of linguistic competence (“Die Grundlagen des menschlichen Sprachvermögens”, 303-317), Gabelentz discusses physical and psychological conditions of speech, the nature of sounds, the way human beings interpret and “animate” their environment, etc. He also develops the idea that simply imitating a perceived noise does not yet qualify the resulting sign as natural language. Gabelentz concurs with Humboldt (cf. Humboldt 1830-1835: §10) that language presupposes articulation (“Gliederung”, “Articulation”, 310). With regard to onomatopoeia, this entails that no sound produced by a human being is a speech sound unless abstraction and generalisation are involved to some extent (311). For example, *Rrrrr!* imitating the sound of a growling dog is not a linguistic sign *per se*, but as soon as the noise and the dog producing it are contrasted, the resulting sound combination (e.g., *Hau-hau rrrrr!*) qualifies as natural language (310). Then a string of sounds no longer simply imitates an auditory perception or the production of a sound, but it is used as a general, abstract symbol (“gemeingültiges, abstractes Symbol”, 311). Pitch, rhythm etc. may further differentiate the symbolic representation, e.g., into parts of speech. Gabelentz illustrates this with the following musical notation of the utterance *Der Hund bellt* in which the two half notes refer to the dog and the three quarter notes to the barking (311):



3.5 On p. 320-324, Gabelentz outlines a typology of exclamations. Apart from presenting a fine-grained semantic classification, he identifies four distinct formal classes of exclamations, one of which is the class of interjections. Interjections, Gabelentz writes, are not associated to any part of speech and therefore, in a sense, “ungeformt”. According to Gabelentz ([1891] 1901: 321-322), there are two main subtypes of interjections. The first type has a more “objective”, imitative function, e.g., German *hopsa!*, which is typically used when prompting someone to jump or when observing a jump (cf. also *pardauz!* accompanying a fall). The second type

has a more “subjective” function, as when the interjection conveys a personal feeling or sensation, e.g. of pain, joy, astonishment, etc.; compare *Au! Ei! Ach! Hm!* in German. Because of their special place in the language, these forms too may retain certain sounds which were replaced by other sounds in the course of regular sound change, for instance interjections beginning with /p/ in New High German.

It is interesting to note that Gabelentz’ typology of interjections was adopted almost verbatim by Hermann Paul, however without any explicit acknowledgment of Gabelentz’ account. Paul’s observations on sound symbolism in his acclaimed book *Principien der Sprachgeschichte* can for the most part be found in chapter 9 (Paul [1880] 1886: 140-151). The parts on interjections and nursery words in this chapter are considerably extended in the fourth edition (Paul [1880] 1909). However, whereas Paul explicitly mentions – and criticizes – Wundt (1900) in his account of nursery words (Paul [1880] 1909: 182), he does not mention Gabelentz ([1891] 1901) in the equally substantially revised section on interjections, although the revision is obviously based on Gabelentz’ distinction between subjective and imitative interjections (cf. also the fifth edition of the book, which is the book’s final version: Paul [1880] 1920: 179-181). Incidentally, Gabelentz’ distinction between the two types is not yet adopted in the third edition of Paul’s book (Paul [1880] 1898: 162-163), which may be an indication that the immediate source for Paul’s revision of his observations on interjections may not have been the first (1891) edition but rather the second (1901) edition of Gabelentz’ *Sprachwissenschaft*.⁴

3.6 In a short section entitled “Die Ausspracheweise oder Stimmungsmimik” (377-380), Gabelentz urges linguists to observe a distinction between two types of expressive language. On the one hand, there is the well-known imitation of objects and events in the external world by means of onomatopoeia, of which many

⁴ By contrast, from the second edition onwards, Paul explicitly refers to Gabelentz’ (1869) distinction between “psychological subject” and “psychological predicate” (cf. also Gabelentz [1891] 1901: 365); see Paul ([1880] 1886: 100-102) and Paul ([1880] 1920: 124-127). The discussion about the distinction between psychological subject and predicate was a very lively one at the end of the 19th century, with contributions by renowned scholars such as F. Brentano, A. Marty, W. Wundt, E. Husserl, among others (cf., e.g., Marty 1897).

instances were discussed in the previous subsections. On the other hand, there is the use a speaker makes of sounds to express different moods or states of mind. The external manifestation of this expressive intention Gabelentz calls “Ausspracheweise” (‘manner of pronunciation’), its content and effect “Stimmungsmimik” (‘mood miming’, 377). The activity of painting with one’s voice (“malen mit der Stimme”) is illustrated with the following examples:

Der Sachse malt aber gern mit der Stimme, und wenn er von dumpfen und tiefen Dingen redet, so kann seine Stimme dumpf und tief werden, und dann kann es ihm geschehen, dass er etwa von einer “schröcklüchen, tüfen Fünsternüss” erzählt. Auch das kann man hören, dass er jetzt in Entschiedenheit von “festen Kruntsätzen” und dann wieder, weich gestimmt, von einem “gleenen Gnespichen” (kleinen Knöspchen) spricht. (378)

Thus, replacing the vowel /ɛ/ by /œ/ in *schrecklich* and /i/ by /ɣ/ in *Finsternis* is a means to strengthen the expressive power of the words in a particular discourse setting. Given that both words may be said to bear negative connotations, the aim of the vowel replacement is to readjust the word forms with their meanings in such a way that the normal bilateral relation between form and meaning is reinterpreted, the use of rounded vowels adding a dark, muffled undertone which the original forms lack. Likewise, replacing the initial /g/ by /k/ in *Grundsätze* (‘principles’) introduces an aspirated voiceless stop which symbolizes a categorical, more determined attitude, whereas replacing /k/ by /g/ and /œ/ by /ɛ/ in *kleine Knöspchen* (‘tiny buds’) has the opposite effect of adding a touch of tenderness. One would be hard-pressed to explain phonetic replacements such as these as instances of imitation. The examples rather illustrate the genuine depictive values speakers can intentionally assign to specific phonetic contrasts in particular discourse settings: /i/ – /ɣ/, /g/ – /k/, /ɛ/ – /œ/ etc.⁵ This is so even in cases where the referential content of an expression, e.g. with respect to quantity or size, is to some extent “reflected” in the choice of

⁵ Compare the illuminating remarks on the “Malpotenzen der menschlichen Stimmittel” by Bühler (1934: 209), with, incidentally, only the faintest of references to Gabelentz (indirectly through the work of another scholar on p. 211).

speech sound, as in Gabelentz' example of three verbs which share the meaning 'to creep' in the Afro-Asiatic language Batta: whereas *džarar* means 'creep in general', *džirir* is predicated of small animals and *džurur* of big, potentially dangerous animals (379). Obviously, in this example form mimes meaning through variation in vowel quantity. And this is where the present overview comes full circle, as Gabelentz' observations on children's creative use of sound contrasts in language acquisition from which we started off in Section 3.1 bear on the same kind of iconicity in language.

4 Concluding remarks

The examples discussed in this article testify to Gabelentz' interest in various aspects of sound symbolism. This interest ties in with Gabelentz' conviction that linguistic phenomena, including those having to do with the expressive values of speech sounds, must be considered against the background of a speaker's "Sprachgefühl", i.e. the "feeling for language" which according to Gabelentz ([1891] 1901: 34) is crucial ("massgebend"). The "Sprachgefühl" constitutes a preliminary, foundational and shared (i.e., inter-subjective) awareness of a specific language, first and foremost a speaker's mother tongue – what is known about a language is rooted "im Boden unseres Sprachgefühls" (360). Gabelentz also uses the simpler term "Gefühl", and on several occasions the "Sprachgefühl" is further differentiated: "Lautgefühl" (188), "Articulationsgefühl" (193), "Wohllautsgefühl" (197), "Gleichklangsgefühl" (227), "Analogiegefühl" (273), "etymologisches Gefühl" (221, 396) and also, as we saw in the previous section, "lautsymbolisches Gefühl". From time to time, the term "Gefühl" alternates with "Bewusstsein" ('consciousness'), in particular when Gabelentz addresses etymological issues (Gabelentz [1891] 1901: 203, 263, 396, 403-404 etc.; at one place also "etymologisches Wissen", 219). Unsurprisingly, the general term "Sprachbewusstsein" is also often used (Gabelentz [1891] 1901: 60, 84, 127, 217, 229, 348 etc.). This terminology not only shows that to Gabelentz "linguistic competence" is a complex and multi-layered object of enquiry, but also that the sense for the various "symbolic" functions of sounds below

and beyond the level of words is part and parcel of this very competence. In modern iconicity research such functions are occasionally treated under the heading of “secondary iconicity” in natural language (De Cuypere & Willems 2008: 7), to which, all things considered, Gabelentz’ discussion already makes an outstanding contribution. Considering that Gabelentz resorts both to the domain of emotion and the domain of consciousness to delimit and define his notion of language awareness, the various observations on the expressive values of sounds in natural language in the *Sprachwissenschaft* ([1891] 1901) may therefore be said to contribute to the overall “air of modernity” (Morpurgo Davies 1998: 299) which obviously characterizes more than just the “arrangement” of topics (ibid.) in Gabelentz’ book.

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